United Nations A/65/PV.33

General Assembly

Sixty-fifth session

Official Records

33rd plenary meeting
Monday, 18 October 2010, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Deiss ..... (Switzerland)

In the absence of the President, Mrs. Waffa-Ogoo (Gambia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda items 14 and 15 (*continued*)

Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations

Report of the Secretary-General (A/65/269)

Culture of peace

Report of the Secretary-General (A/65/269)

Note by the Secretary-General (A/65/299)

Mr. Kurlovich (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The Republic of Belarus has consistently stood for establishing an atmosphere of respect and mutual understanding among peoples and States belonging to different political and socio-economic systems, and welcomes constructive dialogue among different religions and cultures.

Belarus is a staunch supporter of the idea of intensifying interreligious and intercultural dialogue for peace on the principles of mutual respect, equality and tolerance. Clear testimony to this was the initiative put forward by the President of the Republic of Belarus at the 2005 World Summit on the need to recognize the diversity of paths to progress as one of the values of human civilization. Respect for the uniqueness of States and peoples and for their right to choose their own path underlies international dialogue and is an indispensable condition for the maintenance of international peace and security.

In accordance with the Belarusian Constitution, the State is responsible for the preservation of the country's historical, cultural and spiritual heritage and for the promotion of free development of cultures of all nationalities living there.

In Belarus, there are no conflicts based on ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic or religious grounds. Twenty-four ethnic and cultural communities are represented by 123 non-governmental organizations, 41 of which enjoy international status. Representatives of all ethnic communities are entitled to use their own native language, and various educational institutions in which Belarusian is not the native tongue allow study in other languages, including Polish, Lithuanian and Hebrew.

More than 25 religious denominations and over 3,000 religious organizations consolidate effective skills of interreligious dialogue in Belarus. The Institute of Religious Dialogue and Interreligious Communication is working successfully within the Synod of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, its highest body.

An excellent example of constructive interaction and cooperation between national associations and State bodies is the Advisory Interethnic Council, under the plenipotentiary on religions and nationalities. The Council is composed of the representatives of more than 20 nationalities, representing the interests of ethnic and cultural associations currently active in Belarus.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

Every year, Belarus celebrates the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development on 21 May and the International Day for Tolerance on 16 November. Biennial national festivals of ethnic cultures promote inter ethnic cooperation in Belarusian society on the basis of respect and equality.

Belarus has become a venue for regular international meetings and productive dialogue among world religious leaders. In November 2009, on the initiative of the Belarusian Orthodox Church, Minsk hosted an international conference under the theme "Christian-Jewish dialogue: religious values as the foundation for mutual respect in civil society amid the global economic crisis".

The conference made an important contribution to establishing closer cooperation between Christian theologians of varying confessions and secular researchers specializing in the area of dialogue between Christians and Jews and the history of Judaism. The conference was attended by representatives of the Vatican, the United States, Germany, Italy, Israel, France, Sweden, Canada and other countries, with the participation of well-known scholars, priests from traditional Christian churches, and rabbis from Jewish communities.

The promotion of mutual understanding and cooperation among various cultural and religious organizations is a key element of Belarusian foreign policy. Within the United Nations, Belarus consistently undertakes practical steps to encourage and maintain the global agenda for dialogue among civilizations. Belarus fully supports the efforts of the Alliance of Civilizations to strengthen dialogue between cultures and religions, and, in the framework of United Nations mechanisms, actively participates in the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and the Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace.

For Belarus, as a multi-ethnic State at a geographical and historical crossroads of civilizations and with experience in establishing domestic and external conditions for inter ethnic and interreligious friendship, participation in the activities of these forums is a fully legitimate and logical step. We believe that cultural diversity and the promotion of the cultural development of all peoples and nations are a source for the mutual enrichment of the cultural life of humankind. On that basis, Belarus was among the first countries to accede to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Belarus traditionally supports General Assembly resolutions aimed at encouraging dialogue among civilizations. Our country was a sponsor of resolution 64/81 on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, and among the first countries to sponsor resolution 64/14, on the Alliance of Civilizations, adopted in November 2009.

At the Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace held in September 2009 in the framework of the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly, Belarus initiated the idea of convening thematic debates of the General Assembly on interreligious and intercultural dialogue with the participation of religious leaders. The idea was supported by the President of the General Assembly and was incorporated into resolution 64/81 on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace. We look forward to such thematic debates being held in the General Assembly in the months to come.

The General Assembly proclaimed 2010 to be the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, which is also the culmination of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. The Belarusian delegation believes that young people should play an eminent role in furthering successful dialogue among civilizations. At the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly this year (see A/65/PV.5), Belarus proposed the establishment of a global partnership to promote the interests of youth, to be identified as "Help Future Generations Prosper", and the convening of General Assembly thematic debates on this issue. We believe that outreach to the next generation on practices of peace and non-violence that are free from discrimination and bias would help young people to live in a world of peace and harmony.

Belarus, true to its principles and those of the United Nations, will further encourage international efforts to fully implement the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations.

Mr. Stone (Australia): Australia would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on intercultural, interreligious and intercivilizational

understanding (A/65/269) and his note on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (A/65/299), which we are considering here today. We strongly support the Secretary-General in his efforts to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue and understanding, particularly through the Alliance of Civilizations. We would like to thank the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Jorge Sampaio, for his tireless efforts on behalf of the Alliance of Civilizations. We would also like to recognize Turkey and Spain for their work in co chairing the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations.

Australia is encouraged by the work of the Alliance of Civilizations to promote dialogue that delivers change on the ground. We need to confront the threat of cultural and religious division with concrete action. The training of journalists undertaken by the Alliance is one excellent example of such concrete action.

The Alliance of Civilizations complements the regional interfaith initiatives under way in our own Asia-Pacific region, such as the Regional Interfaith Dialogue held in Perth, Australia, in October last year, as well as the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Melbourne last December. Australia also provides extensive support to grass-roots interfaith activities in two of our nearest neighbours — Indonesia and the Philippines — that focus on helping non-governmental organizations on the ground increase understanding between Muslim and Christian communities. For example, since 2002 the Australia-Indonesia Institute's Muslim exchange programme has fostered contact between emerging leaders of the Muslim communities in Australia and Indonesia. The programme now has a community of more than 130 young leaders working to build links with other religious and ethnic groups.

Australia is a highly multicultural society and home to 200 nationalities and more than 100 religions. Today, one in four Australians was born overseas. On top of that, almost as many have at least one parent who was born overseas. Interfaith and intercultural respect and cooperation have not always come easily. Australia has had to learn hard lessons about how prejudice and distrust can be overcome. However, creative and practical programmes that engage youth and harness education at the local level can help us improve the dialogue between cultures and promote peace and understanding. Our role as Member States is to enable and encourage this dialogue, and the United Nations can play an important role as well.

Ms. Halabi (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to address the Assembly today on a very important topic that has been a central issue in major ideological and intellectual debates of recent years. I am referring to the culture of peace and the centrality of dialogue, understanding, cooperation and mutual respect among cultures and religions, as well as to the Alliance of Civilizations for peace in its true meaning and not that of slogans for peace.

It is well known that ideological dialogue is the basis for understanding between international communities and furnishes the elements of an ideological and human renaissance that humankind needs in order to achieve peace, justice and respect for values, wisely pave the way to international understanding, and elevate the common values of human culture.

At this stage in human history, our peoples are confronted not only by cultural misconceptions between the East and the West, but also by misunderstandings among civilizations affecting all parts of our world. It is a world suffering the absence of the values of freedom, justice and human rights and overwhelmed by the dangers of imbalance due to desperation, numerous forms of aggression and the launching of illegitimate wars, discrimination, racism and the suffering of vulnerable States in the harsh economic and financial crises impacting Africa, Asia and Latin America.

All of this has left many peoples of the world with problems and crises that are difficult to remedy. Therefore, the launching of awareness-raising dialogues among all civilizations, which forge and strengthen relationships, is of the utmost urgency. They are lifesaving measures that promote human contact, reinvigorate human civilizational memory, and discourage attacks on civilizations that foment discord among different peoples and races. They also foster diversity and interaction in the international march of civilization, which can transcend the logic of a fake clash.

We also find that the phenomenon of dialogue among civilizations is expanding and that institutions are being established for that purpose. We hope that

these institutions will ask questions that focus on relations among civilizations. Is it really a relationship of dialogue, or is it one of integration, where each civilization learns from its predecessors and then comes up with a new form that is considered to be an improvement, as happened when the Arab civilization carried its wealth of knowledge through Andalusia to Europe?

Since the civilization of today's advanced countries does not abandon this principle but rather builds on the achievements of previous civilizations, we can speak of civilizational integration, or rather of a civilizational alliance and an optimal dialogue that cannot be robbed of its content. This dialogue is aware of its roots and what the present owes to the past, and those concepts that are new and renewed deserve our respect because they seek to entrench the human connection to knowledge, which is a deep and honest conviction opposing ignorance and wrongful bias.

The establishment of bridges of understanding and cooperation among religions and cultures would bolster peace in the world, spread the culture of peace among societies, and diminish the gap of people's ignorance of each other. All of that would mitigate the prejudice and narrow-minded interpretations that ideological extremism tries to promote throughout the world, burdening them with political and ideological sabre-rattling.

The enlightened of the world must promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue and give priority to ideological understanding and respect for the identity of the other, as well as the need not to conflate religion and terrorism. We must also be aware that the absence of understanding and cooperation within the international community is partly the result of humans' misunderstanding of religions and cultures and ignorance of our common denominators. It is not due to structural shortcomings in these noble, moral concepts. Human history demonstrates that extremely beautiful forms of understanding and cooperation among cultures saw the light in ancient times, when military and ideological clashes were the norm.

In recent decades, the international community has witnessed violent forms of conflict and a lack of dialogue and mutual knowledge, although some like to boast of new modes of thought, such as globalization and the information and communications technology revolution. Our purpose is to make communication among civilizations a cultural norm that would introduce us to the world community and represent a pledge of honour to craft it into a message of amity, peace and justice and a call to all the nations of the world.

The race among civilizations must be a race for the greatness of human thought and human genius, because those are ambitions that transcend aggression. It must be a race for a world where there is no usurpation of rights, no occupation of the lands of others, no discrimination based on race or colour, and no injustices that befall people who are displaced from their lands and whose holy shrines are desecrated, as Israel has done to the Palestinian people and as the neo-Nazis are doing with our creeds, beliefs and the lives of our people.

Since 2010 has been proclaimed the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, we must confront all these challenges in order to achieve a world that is more unified and more just; a world that is multicultural, with multiple nationalities, and where an open, democratic dialogue prevails and peoples exercise their natural right to sovereignty and self-determination in a climate of liberty, equality and human dignity.

Mr. Apakan (Turkey): It is a great honour for me to address this forum on intercultural, interreligious and intercivilizational dialogue to achieve a culture of peace. On this occasion, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Joseph Deiss, for convening this meeting. We are convinced that our deliberations today will help to enhance collective peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the activities carried out by the main United Nations entities involved in the field of dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions (A/65/269).

The reason behind the creation of this universal body was to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Today, we cherish the same ideals in a different world, where the driving forces of globalization threaten our common aspiration to peaceful coexistence. We live in an interconnected and interdependent world where global challenges have local impacts and local events impact the whole world.

Regrettably, we have so far failed to overcome polarization, lack of understanding and discrimination

in the international community. Today, stereotypes continue to shape our perception of the other — the other who has a different way of life, cultural values or religious beliefs; the other who indeed enriches our life. Our history reminds us that cultural ignorance and religious intolerance have been major obstacles to peace and development. It is therefore our responsibility to uphold mutual respect among religions and to promote a culture of tolerance and understanding among peoples. Indeed, a culture of peace can be enhanced only by the diversity of traditions and their peaceful cohabitation.

Today's discussion demonstrates that the nations of the world recognize the importance of their collective responsibility to promote a culture of peace. As we approach the end of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, we note with satisfaction that there is a growing interest in the promotion of cultural diversity. We recognize the important role played by UNESCO and other United Nations entities in the promotion of the Year. We believe that activities organized within this framework clearly show that diversity enriches humankind and is a source of creativity and innovation.

Diversity and dialogue have always been the central pillars of the Turkish historical and cultural heritage. Indeed over the centuries, Turkey has historically, geographically and socially bridged many different cultures and tried to create an environment of peace and mutual understanding. This was precisely the reason why, together with Spain, Turkey sponsored the Alliance of Civilizations initiative. The initiative, which was launched by the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Spain in 2005 under the auspices of the Secretary-General, enjoys the support of a growing number of Member States and international organizations. Such wide recognition and support make us all the more hopeful for our future.

To promote an alliance of civilizations requires first and foremost a sense of creativity to attract the attention of various stakeholders. Since its inception, the Alliance of Civilizations has provided a creative approach to engaging various stakeholders in dialogue and has become a sound platform to connect different cultures, to bridge the gaps of understanding and to amplify voices of moderation. Today, it has become a truly global peace initiative and serves as a global facilitator to promote sustainable dialogue among various stakeholders, including young people, women, parliamentarians, the media, civil society and the private sector. On this occasion, I would like to express our thanks to the Secretary-General for his engagement in the activities of the Alliance. I would also like to praise High Representative Sampaio for his tireless efforts.

This year in May, we completed a very successful Forum in Rio de Janeiro. The Forum was an inclusive platform that brought together the knowledge, experience and energy of a wide range of partners. It consolidated the global scope and universal outreach of the Alliance. We will now turn our energy to the next Forum, to be held in December 2011 in Qatar.

Indeed, misperceptions and lack of understanding continue to be the realities of today. A recent report released by the Anna Lindh Foundation, entitled "EuroMed Intercultural Trends 2010: The Anna Lindh Report", highlights that people living in Europe and the southern and eastern Mediterranean currently face a clash of ignorance. The survey's main findings show that one in every four persons from the two sides of the Mediterranean had met people from other countries within the region, and yet there were still profound disparities between what each group perceives as the other's values.

Against this alarming background, the Alliance of Civilizations, together with its partners, is working on a regional strategy for the Mediterranean that aims to bring all relevant stakeholders closer together, enhance human development and foster good-neighbourly relations among societies, institutions and individuals in the region. The strategy and its action plan for 2011-2015 will be adopted at the first Regional Conference for the Mediterranean, which will be held on 9 November in Malta. I would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the Government of Malta for hosting this important Conference. We only hope that the regional strategy will help all sectors of society in the Mediterranean region to interact and to promote the culture of peace together.

Cultures are not self-contained; they evolve through constant dialogue and exchange. As long as we value cultural diversity as a common heritage of humankind, we can attain the quest for social peace and harmony. For that reason, the key to a global culture of peace is dialogue. We must therefore continue our efforts to achieve a world whose richness lies at the centre of its own diversity.

Mr. Yáñez-Barnuevo (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): In 1998, the General Assembly proclaimed the decade 2001–2010 the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. The Assembly's declaration of 2010 as the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, made at the initiative of the General Conference of UNESCO, was to be the culmination of the Decade.

As we approach the end of the Decade, we can make a moderately positive assessment of the progress made by the international community — including States, international organizations and civil society — in promoting a culture of peace, despite all the difficulties and challenges that have arisen in the world throughout that period.

The reports being considered by the General Assembly today account for this well. The report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/65/299 indicates that the International Decade has succeeded in disseminating the concept of a culture of peace at various levels and in various sectors of society and has encouraged the adoption of specific measures to that end. However, it also states that

> "[t]he debate about peace, culture, tolerance, mutual respect, reconciliation and equity in our societies must be reopened and the power of ideas set free so as to arrive at a peace paradigm in a globalized world" (*A/65/299, para. 1*).

A similar conclusion is reached in the 2010 *World Report on the Culture of Peace*, which was prepared by the Foundation Culture of Peace based in Barcelona, with contributions from over 1,000 civil society organizations and from 100 countries throughout the world, and was conveyed to the Secretary-General in accordance with the provisions of resolution 64/80 and distributed to Member States by the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh.

The initiative of the Alliance of Civilizations, which has been led by the Secretary-General since 2005 and was sponsored by Spain and Turkey, has attempted ever since its creation to respond to the challenges posed by diversity and coexistence at the national and international levels. To that end, the ultimate aim of the Alliance is to promote understanding and cooperation among nations and peoples of different cultures and religions, and to counteract the forces that fuel extremism and endanger peace. All of this is based on shared universal values that inspire and guide the actions and spirit of the Alliance of Civilizations and are enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among other basic instruments of international law.

I am pleased to recall that, around this same time this past year, the General Assembly adopted by consensus resolution 64/14, sponsored by 94 States, on the Alliance of Civilizations, demonstrating the broad political support enjoyed by the initiative. I note that the large Group of Friends of the Alliance already numbers 128 members, including States and international organizations alike. The designation of focal points by the members of the Group has allowed the Alliance to work dynamically and with a focus on action. The meeting of Alliance focal points, scheduled for the end of October in Berlin, will be a good opportunity to assess what has been achieved to date and to set new goals for the near future.

Document A/65/349 contains the report recently submitted to the Secretary-General by his High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Jorge Sampaio, and which the Secretary-General has in turn transmitted to the General Assembly. The report includes a summary of the main activities of the Alliance over the past year. As the Secretary-General points out in his introductory letter to the report,

> "In an increasingly interconnected world, often divided by cross-cultural tensions, the Alliance can play a significant role, as a bridge-builder and as a catalyst for ... efforts aimed at furthering trust and cooperation among diverse cultures" (*A/65/349, p. 1*).

In that regard, developing the regional dimension of the Alliance of Civilizations is of great importance. The adoption of regional strategies — beginning in South-East Europe last year at Sarajevo and to be followed in the Mediterranean by the conference to be held in Malta in November — is crucial to translating the Alliance's global objectives into concrete efforts tailored to the circumstances and realities of each region. The next step will be to craft those agreements into real projects that will be determined by action plans and require sustained political and financial support.

For its part, Spain continues to be fully committed to the principles and values of the Alliance of Civilizations and its special focus on action and

achieving results. In the course of Spain's term of office in the rotating chairmanship of the European Union in the first half of this year, the Alliance held a round table on the theme "The Alliance of Civilizations and city diplomacy initiatives", in the context of the European Summit of Local Governments held in Barcelona in February 2010.

I should also like to point out the high-level meeting held in Cordoba in May on the theme "Religious freedom in democratic societies", whose main goal was to develop article 17 of the European Union's operational Treaty, which sets out that the Union will maintain open, transparent and regular dialogue with churches and religious and other types of groups and organizations.

I am also pleased to inform the Assembly of the upcoming inauguration of the United Nations University International Institute for the Alliance of Civilizations, which will be based in Barcelona and serve as a meeting place and an ideal laboratory for undertaking the necessary task of developing and seeking the most effective ways of achieving the Alliance's goals.

Lastly, I should like to refer to the report of the Secretary-General on intercultural, interreligious and intercivilizational dialogue (A/65/269). Among other things, the report refers to ongoing activities in connection with the 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures. The main goal is to demonstrate that diversity enriches humankind and is a source of creativity and innovation. In addition to some of the efforts carried out by the Alliance of Civilizations, the report covers the broad array of projects and actions undertaken by UNESCO, especially in the area of education, to promote dialogue and understanding among cultures, thereby demonstrating its complementarity with the Alliance of Civilizations. The recent renewal of the memorandum of understanding between UNESCO and the Alliance of Civilizations on the occasion of the Alliance's third Forum, held in Rio de Janeiro, has made it possible to broaden cooperation between the two bodies.

The International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World is coming to an end. There is no doubt that the Decade, which began in 2001 with the signing of a manifesto by 75 million people who committed themselves to working to promote the culture of peace in their daily lives, has achieved significant progress in promoting the culture of peace throughout the world, notwithstanding obstacles and difficulties.

However, reality shows that, despite the progress made, there is still much to do and many obstacles to overcome. The fact that the International Decade is coming to an end should not lead us to relax our commitment to promoting a genuine culture of peace throughout the world. The Alliance of Civilizations has proven to be a particularly useful tool for generating dialogue and understanding and for meeting the challenges of our times. The holding of the fourth Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations in Doha, Qatar, in late 2011 will provide us with new prospects to continue to work intensively and in a committed manner to promote a culture of peace that can genuinely and effectively overcome various perceptions through joint efforts in favour of our common humanity.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank you, Madam, for leading our work, and to wish you continued success.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela welcomes the many initiatives carried out worldwide to promote dialogue among civilizations.

In recent days, the streets of New York have been the scene of a fiery protest against the building of an Islamic cultural centre near the so called Ground Zero. According to national and international press agencies, opponents of the project shouted "No mosque under any circumstances". Some carried banners with the word "sharia" written in red paint to symbolize traces of blood.

In September, a preacher threatened to burn a Holy Koran at a public ceremony. In addition, an Islamic centre in California was besieged with signs that read "Wake up America, the enemy is here" and "We do not want temples of the terrorist God near Ground Zero". In Nashville, Tennessee, a mosque under construction was set on fire.

Ten years after the unfortunate attacks of 11 September, anti-Muslim sentiment is on the rise in the United States and Europe. Racist and xenophobic political leaders of the Tea Party of the United States accuse Muslims of worshiping — and I quote the *New York Daily News* — "the monkey god of the terrorists".

On Sunday, 10 October 2010, *The New York Times* published a lengthy article in which it highlighted that there is, in the United States, a strong nucleus of people and organizations, whose influence is expanding, promoting "a spreading fear of Islam and a dehumanization of Muslims".

The renowned Canadian academic economist Michel Chossudovsky, in his article entitled "The Demonization of Muslims and the Battle for Oil", said:

> "Demonization is applied to an enemy which possesses three quarters of the world's oil reserves. 'Axis of evil', 'rogue States', 'failed nations', 'Islamic terrorists': demonization and vilification are the ideological pillars of America's 'war on terror'. They serve as a casus belli for waging the battle for oil.
>
> "The Battle for Oil requires the demonization of those who possess the oil. The enemy is characterized as evil, with a view to justifying military action including the mass killing of civilians."

One of the worst consequences of the events of 11 September 2001 has been a noticeable increase in intolerance. Some, deplorably, associate terrorism with that which is Arab, with that which is Muslim, with Islam. They are employing a false dichotomy: East versus West. Neoconservative political scientist Samuel Huntington predicted that, after the demise of the cold war, "the clash of civilizations will dominate global politics".

We believe that those prejudices are divorced from reality. Neither in the East nor in the West is political or religious fundamentalism the hallmark of civilization. Reductionism of this kind underestimates the internal dynamics and plurality of each civilization.

The Islamic world is rich in history and culture, as well as being geographically diverse. It is a community of approximately 1.6 billion believers, of which 320 million are Arabs. This includes approximately 57 countries, of which 22 are Arab, one is Persian, 13 are part of sub-Saharan Africa, seven are Asian from the Indo Pacific region, three are European and seven are Islamic republics of the former Soviet Union. This constellation of countries, in its political, social and cultural specificities, hosts a richness of diversity and cultural plurality that give rise to freedom and sovereignty.

Human beings are enriched by diversity and, within it, achieve social wholeness. Plurality is the expression of a rich rainbow of options, and it enhances freedom and equality. The rich splendour of the human species reaches fruition in constructive fellowship with trillions of other organisms, including the ecosystem.

Dreams are part of reality, as they inspire our struggles for existence and for the preservation of humanity. The dreams may not look the same, but their paths may cross along the way and they will then recognize themselves in each other.

While violence, racism and xenophobia represent the absolute negation of dialogue, dialogue opens avenues of understanding and is one of the conditions for peaceful coexistence between nations and peoples. Dialogue means tolerance and respect for others. But this does not mean dialogue just for the sake of dialogue. Rather, it should be a journey, an opportunity to build a society based on justice, equity, equality, freedom and solidarity. Dialogue, which does not exclude debate and differences, is essential to achieving peace and to ensuring human dignity.

Inciting hatred and discrimination is a crime. The American Convention on Human Rights states in article 13 that:

> "Any propaganda for war and any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitute incitements to lawless violence or to any other similar action against any person or group of persons on any grounds including those of race, color, religion, language, or national origin shall be considered as offenses punishable by law."

For its part, the Durban Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, which was held in Durban, South Africa:

> "Calls upon States, in opposing all forms of racism, to recognize the need to counter anti-Semitism, anti-Arabism and Islamophobia worldwide, and urges all States to take effective measures to prevent the emergence of movements based on racism and discriminatory ideas concerning these communities" (*A/CONF.189/12, Programme of Action, para. 150*).

I conclude with this question: what are we, at the United Nations, doing to prevent the continued increase in those heinous forms of discrimination against human beings, cultures and civilizations?

Mr. Borg (Malta): The two agenda items that the Assembly is considering in this plenary meeting, namely, "Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations" and "Culture of peace", are mutually inclusive and complementary to each other. Let me take this opportunity to thank and congratulate the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, former President Sampaio, for his outstanding leadership and tenacity in maintaining the Alliance momentum, attracting new members and building consensus among its constituency and in delivering on some of its objectives.

Malta believes that dialogue among cultures and civilizations is essential for a better future — irrespective of our origins or beliefs — and is an important tool in strengthening dialogue and a means for cooperation between and among countries of the Group of Friends of the Alliance.

In my statement, I would like to focus on how Malta is contributing towards the enhancement of the dialogue among civilizations in its own region, the Mediterranean.

It is recognized that the Mediterranean represents a unique experience of similarities, common history and overlapping cultures, which contributes to the objectives of the Alliance of Civilizations, namely, to counter divisions, polarization and extremism within and among societies.

With recurrent tensions threatening peace and security in the Mediterranean region and beyond, it is important that all stakeholders continue to strengthen the global scope of the Alliance, which, as rightly pointed out by Secretary-General Ban Ki moon, is the leading United Nations forum dealing with intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

The people-to-people approach must continue to guide our endeavours, especially those aimed at strengthening on-the-ground efforts and cooperation with a view to sowing the seeds of reconciliation and understanding.

In three weeks' time, from 8 to 9 November, Malta will be hosting the first Alliance of Civilizations regional conference for the Mediterranean. As an active member of the Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends, Malta intends to ensure that this conference's outcome will provide another feather in the cap of the Alliance, especially through the enhancement of good governance, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue among and between Mediterranean States.

Indeed, this first regional conference for the Mediterranean will see the adoption of the first regional strategy for the Mediterranean and an action plan, paving the way for innovative projects and initiatives aimed at strengthening intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

The primary aims of the strategy are to contribute to the general ongoing efforts to bring relevant cultural, economic, social and political stakeholders together from both sides of the Mediterranean, promote mutual understanding and improve perceptions of each other. It will also seek to defuse tensions and bridge divides, enhance security and human development, and foster good-neighbourly relations among societies, institutions and individuals in the Mediterranean region.

The first regional conference for the Mediterranean will provide a platform for open and frank exchanges between and among representatives of the Mediterranean region with the hope that it will hopefully leave an indelible mark in the Alliance's intercultural dialogue process.

Malta's commitment to intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean has been continuous. It has been a long-standing vocation since Malta joined this family of nations. Indeed, Malta has not missed an opportunity to contribute further to this dialogue of partners.

In that regard, Malta also plays an active role in the Union for the Mediterranean. Firm in the belief that dialogue and cooperation contribute significantly to the stability and security of the Euro-Mediterranean region, Malta has, since the inception of the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue, held that the centrality of the objectives of the Union remains crucial in any successful achievement of this novel partnership.

Malta is proud and honoured to have nominated a Deputy Secretary-General for the conference, and to have been entrusted with the portfolio covering social and civil affairs, an area undoubtedly of vital interest

to all partners in the Union and which will serve to further dialogue in the Mediterranean.

Malta is also pleased to be the seat of the headquarters of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, which brings together the parliaments of all countries bordering the Mediterranean. The Assembly was established to bring together all the littoral States of the Mediterranean on an equal footing in a unique forum of their own, to examine questions and take decisions on issues of direct interest to the countries of the region.

The primary mission of the Assembly is to bring the people's representatives of the Mediterranean together to promote cooperation, dialogue and mutual understanding. In that regard, it was a privilege for my delegation to have been the sponsor, together with the delegation of France, of resolution 64/124 of this General Assembly, which was adopted in December 2009, granting observer status to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean to participate in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly.

The fifth plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, to be held in 10 days' time from 28 to 30 October 2010 in Rabat, Morocco, will be yet another occasion when parliamentarians from the Mediterranean littoral States will once again engage in sharing of initiatives, ideas, proposals and solutions in the continuous search for an intercultural parliamentary diplomacy in order to establish durable peace and sustainable prosperity for all citizens of the Mediterranean.

Malta strongly believes that we, as United Nations Member States and proud of our history and heritage, can and should strengthen our political will to consolidate that which we have achieved so far and unite our efforts so as to engage collectively and constructively in the promotion of a fruitful dialogue between and among partners from different regions.

Malta's vocation is to continue to strive to stem prejudices and overcome obstacles that hinder and jeopardize the harmonious interaction between peoples of diverse sociocultural backgrounds and religious beliefs. The bridge we are building should be based on solid pillars of mutual understanding and respect. In achieving that goal, a concerted effort is required in a process that enjoys sufficient visibility to win both the minds and hearts of our peoples.

Mr. Ali (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, please allow me to express my delegation's appreciation for the inclusion of these two agenda items in our programme of work this year. The topics of the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilization and the Culture of Peace are very important given the Assembly's broad responsibility for promoting a culture of peace and consolidating the principles of dialogue and coexistence.

The recent incidents of clashes and confrontation around the world make our discussion on dialogue among civilizations aimed at consolidating the values of peace and coexistence quite significant. In that regard, we note many initiatives whose recommendations we hope will be implemented. We would also like to note, in particular, the initiatives of the Non-Aligned Movement leaders at a meeting held in Manila, Philippines, last March.

That accomplishment was the result of persistent efforts by many countries, including Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, Qatar and Senegal and the Sudan. In this context, I should like to recall the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly held in November 2008 in New York at the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. That meeting was part of a process, started in Mecca and continued in Madrid, which aimed at translating the same noble goals we are discussing today into tangible reality.

We would like to underscore the importance of efforts made in the past few years in various relevant forums. They have been an expression of our people's determination to embrace dialogue among civilizations as a cornerstone of cooperation and coexistence. At the same time, such efforts are an expression of our people's rejection of the notion of the clash of civilizations and cultures, as advocated by certain misguided voices.

We in the Sudan believe that people were created as different races, tribes, ethnicities, colours and languages in order to cooperate, interact and exchange for our greater good. We therefore strongly reject and condemn practices that have recently emerged of defiling religious symbols. We also reject supremacist claims and recent forums for the desecration of religious symbols, venerated persons and holy books under the slogan of the freedom of expression. We refuse to accept such a justification for such behaviour.

Globalization has offered the world great mechanisms and possibilities for communication, but these can be used to negative ends if we, as countries, governmental organizations and civil society organizations, do not promote an international understanding that enhances mutual respect and promotes a culture of peace and dialogue, so that we are able to build bridges instead of walls.

To that end, we call upon the international community and those in favour of dialogue to support the activities and efforts of the Alliance of Civilizations. We would like to note that the United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations has stated that the Alliance is being hindered by a shortfall in resources, which in turn impedes the implementation of the goals set by the Assembly in many resolutions.

The wise leadership of the patriotic sons of the Sudan managed to bring to an end the longest civil war in Africa since the end of the colonial period, which our people inherited, one generation after another. That success was crowned with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, which entrenches the principles of peace and dialogue among the people of the Sudan. The coming months will see the final chapter of the implementation of the Agreement with the exercise of the right of the people of Southern Sudan to self-determination. In that context, my Government is committed to allowing that process to happen in a democratic and transparent manner, giving every citizen the right to express his or her opinion, freely and fairly.

My country will also continue its efforts to negotiate with the Darfur rebels in Doha under the auspices of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, the Emir of Qatar. In that regard, we urge the international community to call upon the Darfur leaders who refuse to join the negotiation in Doha, to do so and thus to work for peace. We also urge in particular those countries that are hosting rebel leaders to insist on the urgent need for them to join the negotiations.

The topic of the culture of peace has become the subject of media attention and has received the praise of writers and poets, becoming part of our school, college and educational curricula. We have established centres to conduct research and studies on issues of peace and dialogue aimed at serving our people, our neighbours and the rest of the world.

Achieving a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations cannot be separated from the Millennium Development Goals, which aim to promote dialogue between the North and the South and between the most developed and the least developed countries. That would undoubtedly help overcome national, regional and international conflicts, and would defeat the pretexts of those who deny others on the grounds of race, religion, culture and civilization.

This drive in favour of peace and dialogue should be supported by cooperative efforts among all leaders and youth gatherings in order to promote mutual understanding and a culture that our children would learn from and believe in.

We must be guided by the tolerance that is part of our faith to remain true to the message of worldwide peace, for which all religions, cultures and civilizations yearn, based on the values of peace, tolerance and coexistence. In that context, my delegation welcomes the conference to be held in Doha, Qatar, in late 2011.

Mr. Nickels (United States of America): The United States is grateful for the opportunity to speak on the important agenda items encompassed by the culture of peace.

2010 is the final year of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. We commend the work that UNESCO, UNICEF and other United Nations organizations have done throughout this Decade.

The United States supports efforts around the world aimed at creating forums where people with differing views can express themselves through dialogue. That is why we joined the Alliance of Civilizations and why we support initiatives like Jordan's draft resolution this year on a week of interfaith harmony (A/65/L.5).

The United States believes that peace can be achieved when peoples, religions and races come together to understand and accept one another, and to shun the violence and hatred borne of intolerance. Fostering religious and cultural diversity and affirming mutual understanding are the cornerstones of a true and lasting peace. The United States affirms unequivocally that freedom of expression and open intercultural and

interreligious dialogue are critical to combating intolerance and to promoting peaceful coexistence.

Though the decade for a culture of peace is drawing to a close, we look forward to the next decade with its continued opportunities for dialogue. As President Obama said in his speech in Cairo in 2009:

> "All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit ourselves to an effort — a sustained effort — to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings."

Mr. Dwivedi (India): I am deeply honoured and privileged to participate in today's joint debate on the agenda items "Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations" and "Culture of peace".

As the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World comes to an end, and we celebrate the International Year of Rapprochement of Cultures in 2010, we have the opportunity to take a holistic view of the progress made so far and to assess the challenges that lie ahead.

Please allow me to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on intercultural, interreligious and intercivilizational dialogue (A/65/269) and to the Director-General of UNESCO for its report entitled "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010" (A/65/299).

In today's world we are witnessing the rise of extremism and intolerance, outbreaks of sectarian violence and the increasing use of the language of hatred and violence. These pose a serious challenge to the very foundations of our society. The increasing interdependence and interconnectedness of our world have also perhaps accentuated the fault lines in our society. While there is an accelerated pace in economic and technological development, the same, regrettably, cannot be said with regard to ethical, moral and cultural development in our society. Indeed, our times have seen the rise of the scourge of terrorism.

The environment in which we live today is also accentuated by disparities, deprivation and exploitation. That is hardly conducive to laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Conscious of that stark reality, our former Prime Minister Shrimati Indira Gandhi noted as early as 1972, at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, that poverty and need were the worst polluters. That stirred a global debate on the need to ensure that poverty eradication and developmental imperatives remained at the fore along with environmental challenges in our pursuit of sustainable development.

Intercultural and interreligious dialogue is a necessity and one of the central elements in developing a better understanding of the apparent contradictions and divergent approaches that exist today in our societies. We need to create an environment conducive to fostering dialogue among diverse cultures, races, faiths and religions and that inculcates the values that promote a transition from force to reason and from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace.

Dialogue among different cultures and religions is also important because it is precisely in the absence of such dialogue and understanding that intolerance, bigotry and violence flourish. That is why extremist ideologies, violence and terrorism have grown in a world in which we seem to be moving away from dialogue and understanding. There can be no disputing that terrorism, which is a manifestation of extremism, intolerance and violence, is the antithesis of all religions. No religion condones violence or the killing of human beings. It is therefore imperative that the nations of the world work together in a concerted manner to tackle the menace of terrorism and extremism, which are anathema to modern societies.

All the great religions of the world essentially represent what the Indian ethos postulates, that is, "the truth is one, the wise call it by many names". Compassion, mercy and tolerance are the common values and beliefs among all major faiths of the world. We must learn to live our faith with integrity while respecting and accepting each other.

India, the largest democracy in the world, a nation of unparalleled diversity with a population of over 1 billion, is the second most populous country in the world. While India of course has the largest Hindu population, we also have one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. India provides a home to a very significant number of practitioners of practically every other major religion of the world, be it Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism,

Zoroastrianism or the Baja's. India is the birthplace of Jainism. Gateman Buddha gave his first sermon in Senath, an eminent centre of Indian philosophy, after he attained enlightenment in Both Gaye.

The history of India, in essence, is a narrative of conversations among different civilizations and, indeed, conversation with nature itself. India is home to scores of languages, hundreds of dialects, thousands of cuisines and a medley of races, colours, landscapes and cultures. This assimilation and accommodation of diversity have contributed to the richness of our composite culture and the durability of our civilization. Our civilizational legacy treats nature as a source of nurturing and places high value on living in harmony with nature. The Vedas are a repository for the holistic development of the human being in full harmony with its surroundings.

The principle that the entire world is one family has run like a thread through our constant interaction and exchange of thoughts with the outside world. The noble principles of life and spiritualism, including non-violence, have influenced successive generations of people worldwide. The interaction between India and the West goes back to the time of ancient Greece. Millenniums ago, the interaction between those two civilizations produced the exquisite Andhra art form. India's contact with Islam produced the beautiful confluence of the Indo Islamic culture, which includes the great human values of Sufism. Indeed, India would not have succeeded in holding together and strengthening a composite Indian identity unless Indians practised tolerance and were determined to live together in peace.

The father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi, was the greatest apostle of peace and non-violence. We firmly believe that Gandhi is not the past, he is the future also. He said,

> "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible".

We believe that no culture or religion is superior to any other, and have always benefited from our interactions with various civilizations throughout our history. We in India understand the importance of building alliances among religions, cultures and ethnic groups. We have always supported all efforts to build bridges of understanding among nations, peoples, religions and cultures across the world. It is our considered view that successful pluralism must be grounded on the basic tenets of mutual understanding and respect for diverse traditions. Those are also critical for the harmonious development of all sectors of society, including when it comes to gender equity and the empowerment of women all over the world.

Global efforts towards peace and reconciliation can only succeed with a collective approach that is built on commitment, trust, dialogue and collaboration. We must do this at all levels: within nations, within regions and within the broader international community. The only way to achieve this goal is to move conceptually to a new dimension of dialogue and harmony among diverse cultures, races, faiths and religions so that all human beings can live in the sane and peaceful global society of our collective dreams.

Mr. Jamaal (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): The future of security, stability and development in the world is contingent on reverence for the principles of mutual understanding and tolerance among peoples. Establishing an international partnership for dialogue, cooperation, peace and development that promotes communication between all nations around the world regardless of colour, race, religion or language is certainly crucial for achieving peace and security.

We must recall that the darkest chapters of humankind's history and the worst atrocities committed against humanity essentially have as their source doctrines of racial superiority and dogmas positing civilizational or cultural superiority. Such notions have lost sight of the truth that a man remains a man, whether he has white, black or yellow skin and whether he is Muslim, Jewish or Christian. They have also lost sight of the fact that human civilization is a shared outcome drawing upon various sources and growing and prospering due to contributions from the East and the West, the North and the South. Human culture itself has multiple origins and colours and has developed and grown thanks to the linguistic, literary, intellectual and artistic creations of peoples from all continents.

The dialogue that Tunisia wishes to see and wants to enshrine in international relations can be successful only to the extent that each of us, whether in the East or the West, works to initiate a culture of dialogue, tolerance and human rights — above all in our own countries. We must do so through educational and teaching programmes as well as grass-roots activities

and information and communications programmes, in particular with youth and women, in order to anchor this culture in human relations and make it an unwavering conviction in our thinking and in the behaviour of all human societies.

This is what Tunisia has undertaken to do, since the start of the 1990s, by readjusting to that end its educational and teaching programmes. We have established a world solidarity award and a world prize for Islamic studies advocating moderation, the golden mean and enlightened thinking. We have also hosted many meetings and regional and international conferences focused on the dialogue of civilizations and international solidarity, which gave rise to a very worthwhile series of agreements and appeals to that end.

We must also, in this context, work to combat the phenomena of poverty, illiteracy, disease, unemployment, isolation and marginalization, and do so with all of the determination and perseverance that we are capable of in order to find remedies to these phenomena and to eradicate their root causes, taking into account each country's resources and situation.

Based on the firm belief that these phenomena are a major handicap today for developing countries that prevent them from developing their own potential so that they can achieve progress and do away with their vulnerability, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali made an appeal, in 1999, to create a World Solidarity Fund aimed at eradicating disparities and strengthening solidarity among peoples. That proposal was welcomed by the United Nations.

Another Tunisian initiative that calls for establishing bonds of friendship, cooperation and mutual esteem among peoples regardless of race, culture or faith is the Ben Ali Chair for Dialogue of Civilizations and Religions. Established in 2001, this post is aimed at increasing and spreading knowledge. Its key role is to encourage knowledge of other civilizations and religions. It encourages and provides material and moral support for actions that advocate rapprochement among peoples.

Respect for the identity and uniqueness of peoples is the best framework for establishing a balanced dialogue among equals between civilizations, cultures and religions. Cultural difference, because of the variety of contributions made to it and its great breadth, is indispensable for enriching human civilization. However, difference should not be used to justify any type of rejection or exclusion. Instead, it should offer broad horizons for diversity and enrichment.

Tunisia reiterates from this rostrum its determination and its goodwill to cooperate with the entire international community to bring about a world of peace, security and prosperity.

Mrs. Chaimongkol (Thailand): Less than three weeks ago, our leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Indeed, without respect and understanding for each other, sustainable peace and development cannot be achieved.

Thailand supports every effort that aims to promote greater understanding and expand dialogue among cultures, religions and civilizations. In this regard, Thailand takes note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/65/269), which highlights the activities carried out within the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations and provides an overview of other major regional and global initiatives taken in this area. Thailand supports the recommendation of the report that the work on dialogue among cultures, religions and civilizations be streamlined in the future in order to make global efforts in this area more coherent, visible and easily understandable for the public and non-United Nations actors.

I would like to share some of Thailand's views.

First, as my Foreign Minister said during the general debate (see A/65/PV.23), we live in a world of divides, be they politico-security, socio economic, digital or even based on beliefs. To overcome them, we need concerted efforts. The Alliance of Civilizations can be a useful tool for bridging these divides. It should also cooperate with related United Nations agencies, regional organizations and relevant interfaith dialogue frameworks, such as the Special Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development and the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, in order to foster understanding and prevent confrontation.

Secondly, human rights are a top priority for the Thai Government and its foreign policy. While fundamental human rights are universal, dialogue among cultures, religions and civilizations can help to

promote these values, bridge the gaps between different interpretations and standards and enhance the effectiveness of their implementation across cultures and boundaries. Such forums as interfaith dialogues and the Alliance of Civilizations can make invaluable contributions to fostering common understanding.

Thirdly, at the regional level, Thailand has been active in promoting closer interaction and greater understanding between peoples in South-East Asia by enhancing the connectivity of regional infrastructure. Through various initiatives, such as the Master Plan on Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Connectivity, the Initiative for ASEAN Integration Strategic Framework, the East-West Economic Corridor, the Greater Mekong subregion projects, as well as other bilateral initiatives, the free flow of goods, services, and people brings with it a greater understanding of different cultures, religions and beliefs.

Thailand stands ready to work closely with the General Assembly, United Nations bodies and all parties concerned to foster intercultural and interreligious cooperation.

Mr. Balé (Congo) (*spoke in French*): The founding concept of the United Nations was the quest for peace and the practice of tolerance, the prohibition of the use of weapons and the promotion of economic and social development for all peoples so that one of the greatest tragedies humankind had ever seen would never again recur. Most particularly, it was to protect future generations from the scourge of war.

I would like here to acknowledge the timeliness and relevance of the subject under consideration today, 10 years after the proclamation of the International Year for the Culture of Peace, and particularly this year, 2010, which marks the end of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World.

Recent history following the World Wars is so replete with bloody events and upheavals — indeed, as many today as in the past — that violence continues to permeate our world. Intolerance and scorn for each other's cultures lays the groundwork for extremism. Racism, xenophobia and scorn for other cultures continue to feed off of racial and cultural prejudices. The mix of various crises — the economic, financial, social and food crises — alongside the negative effects of climate change and poverty, only worsens this negative trend, further exposing the weakest, most vulnerable and poorest.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express from this rostrum the Congo's support for all initiatives aimed at promoting the culture of peace and encouraging dialogue among cultures and civilizations. Dialogue among civilizations and its other facet, interfaith dialogue, clearly draw from the aims and principles of the United Nations. That is why the Congo once again welcomes this new sign of the times and hopes that this dialogue among civilizations that we hope for is indeed the path that will lead us towards the peaceful, just and prosperous world to which we all aspire.

My country recently joined the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations, thus reflecting the commitment of the Congolese Government to actively take part, together with other members of the international community, in this quest for peace and tolerance through a dialogue among civilizations. Today's debate offers a platform for all civilizations and cultures and all religions to undertake joint initiatives and partnerships at the various levels in our States, individually or collectively and within our respective societies, so that the virtues of dialogue, tolerance and respect for cultural diversity serve the cause of peace and development.

In this context, I would like to recall the virtues enshrined by the African tradition of discussion, which also provides an opportunity for dialogue in the quest for peaceful and consensus-based solutions to disputes that arise in society. African discussions involve reconciling opposing views and forging an awareness of a shared destiny.

Religions, in principle, advocate tolerance and love for one's neighbour. But throughout their history, and today once again, they have led and at times still lead to violence and intolerance when they are carried along on the currents of extremism. We believe that now is the time to encourage meetings between the different faiths, in order to develop, in a non-denominational spirit, a dialogue that is oriented towards peace. Such opportunities should allow all of them to explain in more depth the doctrine of their particular religious community and more clearly illustrate its characteristics. This constructive dialogue should bring about a growing mutual awareness of each faith along with a greater esteem of the teachings

that they convey. Religious communities would thereby cooperate more broadly in all undertakings that, depending on the requirements of the various parties, contribute to the achievement of the shared goals of peace and development.

His Excellency Mr. Denis Sassou Nguesso, President of the Republic of the Congo, has made peace based on dialogue his political credo. It is through the virtues of dialogue and tolerance that the Congo has been able to overcome the obstacles that were put in its path by an unprecedented civil war and has been able to restore peace. In the wake of the fratricidal violence that plunged the country into grieving and destroyed its social and economic fabric between 1997 and 1999, non-denominational services were successfully held. Thus prayers and pleas uttered with a single heart and in unison contributed, with other vital forces in the country, to overcoming the divisions that could still plunge the country into further turmoil. The Government understood the beneficial impact of this effort, as did religious communities. Therefore all religious faiths, separate from the State but placed on the same footing, underteok this common cause of peace, which is a prerequisite for development.

It is therefore obvious, in this respect, that we should encourage a complementary dynamic between, on the one hand, the State in its governing role as the guarantor of peace and security and, on the other hand, the religious faiths involved in an interfaith dialogue devoted to winning over hearts and minds, with the noble aim of promoting a true culture of peace. Conversion is, we know, one of the principles that underpins religion.

We are at a symbolic turning point at the end of this first decade devoted to the culture of peace. Yet peace can only prosper and last if there is a fertile breeding ground for justice and equality, along with tolerance and respect for diversity, progress and prosperity for all. In this regard, the dialogue of cultures and civilizations and interreligious dialogue are clearly avenues that can lead to more coordinated efforts to develop a true culture of peace.

My delegation expresses its support for an approach that involves unified action, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his report (A/65/269). Indeed, by establishing sustained momentum we can hope to make true progress towards achieving this project of the founding fathers of the Organization, that is, constructing a world that is peace-loving, prosperous for all, rich in diversity and that shares the same ideals.

Mr. Barbalić (Bosnia and Herzegovina): Allow me to begin my statement by thanking the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on intercultural, interreligious and intercivilizational dialogue (A/65/269). We are also grateful for the annual progress report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, 2001 to 2010. Dialogue among peoples, cultures, faiths and civilizations is essential for the growth of the global culture of peace.

We note with appreciation UNESCO's leading role in promoting the observance of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures in 2010. As the primary focus of the Year, the significant number of activities — more than 700 — was impressive, and included a variety of projects presented in fields such as the arts, education and the interests of youth. They also enjoyed broad participation by many segments of society, particularly young people.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is also very pleased with the fact that the Alliance of Civilizations, launched in 2005 and welcomed by resolution 60/1, has shown significant results. In recent years, the Alliance has managed to maintain its momentum, attract new members, build consensus among its constituents and deliver on some of its core objectives. Bosnia and Herzegovina also commends the third annual report of Mr. Jorge Sampaio, the United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations. We greatly appreciate his enormous efforts towards the realization of the goals of the Alliance and his results-oriented approach.

Bosnia and Herzegovina wishes to confirm its commitment to participate actively in the initiatives of the Alliance of Civilizations as a member of its Group of Friends. We continue to support the principles and activities of the Alliance in promoting a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, religions and cultures, as dialogue can significantly contribute to strengthening mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

In our view, the promotion of true dialogue among civilizations is one of the most important

political instruments for strengthening peace and prosperity in the world. In this regard, Bosnia and Herzegovina strongly supports the Alliance's constructive approach in dealing with the challenges of global relations today.

I am proud to inform the General Assembly that the Regional Strategy on Intercultural Dialogue and Cooperation in South-East Europe — the first ever within the framework of the Alliance — was adopted last December in Sarajevo, in a unique demonstration of the commitment to enhancing regional cooperation among the countries of South-East Europe. The high-level representatives of 14 countries of the region demonstrated their commitment to further promoting good-neighbourly relations, aimed at strengthening bridges between peoples and communities by promoting intercultural dialogue.

The action plan for implementing the Strategy was introduced in May this year. The same period has also seen the preparation of a regional strategy for the Mediterranean, producing a basic document for work within the Alliance of Civilizations on improving European-Mediterranean dialogue in the region over the next four years. Bosnia and Herzegovina fully supports the coordinated activities set out in the Strategy for the Mediterranean and expresses its expectation that the action plan for implementing the Strategy, whose aim is to develop regional partnerships among peoples and nations, will contribute to improving cooperation and further strengthening stability and development in the region. We therefore look forward to the ministerial conference in November, when we expect the new Strategy to be adopted.

Bringing about advanced intercultural and interreligious dialogue aimed at promoting tolerance and peace is of the highest importance for my country. We recognize that the protection of cultural heritage and the free exercise of religion while respecting traditions are among the basic fundamental rights necessary to achieving a comprehensive peace. We in Bosnia and Herzegovina have also come to the realization that dialogue must be conducted on a platform of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and the dignity of the individual. We are fully aware that without open dialogue there can be no true reconciliation. In this regard, Bosnia and Herzegovina welcomes and supports all resolutions that promote intercultural, interreligious and intercivilizational dialogue.

I would like to express our satisfaction with the progress that the Alliance of Civilizations has made in recent years with projects such as the International Year of Youth on the theme of dialogue and mutual understanding. This initiative will contribute to the promotion of the ideals of peace and solidarity across generations, cultures, religions and civilizations.

Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance that we make concerted joint efforts to promote better media visibility for the Alliance and help it achieve its objectives. Implementing a more effective communications strategy is one of the priorities that needs further development. We welcome the outcome of the third Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, held in Rio de Janeiro, which confirmed the Alliance's global scope as the leading United Nations forum dealing with intercultural dialogue and cooperation. There is no doubt that the fourth Forum, which will be hosted by the Government of Qatar in 2011, will continue with effective ways of strengthening cooperation and intercultural dialogue.

Mr. Bame (Ethiopia): I would like to thank the President for convening this joint debate on the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations and the culture of peace. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report (A/65/269) on the agenda items under consideration. My delegation believes that the report enables us to be cognizant of the activities of the United Nations and its affiliated entities with regard to dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions.

My delegation fully associates itself with the statement of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We should recall that the Millennium Declaration, adopted in September 2000 (resolution 55/2), clearly indicated that tolerance was one of the fundamental values essential to international relations in the twenty-first century, including the active promotion of a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations. The Declaration highlighted that globalization increased people's interconnectedness and hence brought about greater interaction between cultures and civilizations.

In that regard, the celebration in 1999 of the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations underscored that globalization was not only an

economic, financial and technological process that could offer great benefits; it also presented us with the challenge of preserving and celebrating the rich cultural diversity of humankind and indigenous civilizations.

The challenges that we face today, be they political or otherwise, would be easier to address if dialogue among civilizations were promoted as an approach to tackling the fault lines in relationships among nations. We need to keep in mind that efforts towards peace and prosperity at the international level could be successful if the peoples of the world nurtured dialogue along cultural lines. This path of communication, we believe, can bring about understanding and respect between and among peoples of different traditions.

For us in Ethiopia, the coexistence of different peoples and long-standing tolerance among cultures and denominations is a unique heritage and way of life. In fact, we consider it a matter of survival, and the glue that holds our social fabric together in times of ordeal or foreign aggression. It is our belief that this experience of harmonious relationships among the people of Ethiopia could be exemplary for other nations and help all peoples live in peace.

The Ethiopian Federal Constitution is firmly anchored on the principle, among others, of recognizing and safeguarding individual identities and rights, as well as of ensuring the full representation and participation of all nations and nationalities in the political and socio economic activities of the country. All of that is observed without compromising our commitment to the goal of promoting unity in diversity.

Ethiopia is taking practical steps to advance the dialogue agenda. A high-level conference on the role of religion in peacebuilding and development, held from 16 to 17 June 2008 in Addis Ababa, was conducted in the presence of the President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, religious leaders, Government officials, scholars and representatives of civil society organizations.

It is also worth mentioning that the Government of Ethiopia, in collaboration with the Spanish Government and the European Union, plans to organize a seminar on interreligious dialogue in November 2010. The seminar will bring together federal and regional Government officials, representatives of religious institutions, elders, members of academia and civil society organizations. The seminar is expected to publicize and promote the initiative of the Alliance of Civilizations in political circles, civil society and Ethiopian academic circles.

We are well aware that durable peace and prosperity can only be secured through a continuous process of dialogue among different views and interests. Ethiopia is firmly committed to advancing the objectives of the Alliance of Civilizations, which were launched in 2005 at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey and under the auspices of the United Nations. I am pleased to announce that Ethiopia, as a member of the Alliance, is currently elaborating its national plan of action for the Alliance of Civilizations.

In conclusion, I would like to reassure the Assembly that Ethiopia will always remain firmly committed and will continue to actively play its role in the pursuit of this paramount global agenda of dialogue among civilizations.

Mr. Solón (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, I would like very much to welcome this debate on cultures, religions and civilizations.

Bolivia is a country that promotes the culture of peace. We have enshrined that conviction in article 10 of our new political Constitution, which rejects all forms of aggression and war to resolve any type of conflict.

Bolivia is a country that promotes the meeting of civilizations and cultures. It is for that reason that the State's new political Constitution has changed our country's name to the Plurinational State of Bolivia, for we recognize that there are 36 nations on Bolivian territory. They have the same rights and deserve the same recognition. They are all equal in the eyes of the State.

In our view, nations of the world are increasingly moving towards plurinational States. In other words, there are more nations that contain groups of civilizations and peoples with different cultures and different religions. Increasingly, we are plurinational within our own countries.

Bolivia is a country that vigorously fights discrimination and racism. We do so because the vast majority of our indigenous population has for centuries

suffered discrimination and racism at first hand. It is for that reason that we adopted a law against discrimination and racism this year. The legislation establishes a set of measures, institutions and penalties to ensure that all types of racial and other discrimination are gradually overcome and eradicated in our country.

It is worth mentioning that this law against racism is also meant to ensure that the media, as set out in the report under review (A/65/269), must provide objective information, avoid the use of stereotypes and counter any incitement to hatred and violence. For us, it is essential that, in the fight against discrimination and racism, the media play a crucial role in promoting a culture of peace and in rejecting hatred and any actions prejudicial to the minority persons and cultures that exist in many of our countries.

We note with grave concern the growing new wave of discrimination and xenophobia, especially in developed countries of the North. It must be said that among the structural causes of the phenomenon of discrimination we are witnessing are the current worsening social and economic conditions, which are deepening with time. It is essential that we recognize this fact and take concrete steps to counter it. We propose that this dialogue on cultures, civilizations and religions take on the economic dimension as well so that we can soon evaluate the impact of the economic crisis on our societies and on this dialogue among civilizations and cultures. We also believe that it is urgent to begin a discussion on an actual programme of work to set out measures to counter the wave of racism, xenophobia and discrimination that has been brought about by the world economic crisis.

For the Plurinational State of Bolivia, a world at peace is a world without discrimination or racism.

Mr. Onemola (Nigeria): Nigeria expresses its appreciation to the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session, especially for this joint debate on agenda items 14 and 15, on the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations and on the Culture of peace, respectively. We also thank the Secretary-General for the reports contained in documents A/65/269 and A/65/299.

The relevant report covers omnibus issues and reviews the activities of the major United Nations bodies concerned with the subject under review, pursuant to resolutions 60/4 and 64/81. We note in particular that the report provides detailed information on the third Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and on the progress made to date with regard to the promotion of United Nations objectives through outreach programmes, collaboration with faith-based organizations and the building of strategic awareness schemes through communication, including improving educational activities on the issue.

The special event organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on 21 April 2010 at United Nations Headquarters to celebrate the International Year on the Rapprochement of Cultures pursuant to resolution 64/81 — during which the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session and the Secretary-General renewed their commitment — was significant owing to the fact that several useful proposals were made to advance action on how to further enrich our objectives in this era of globalization.

We are pleased to note that UNESCO, the lead focal point on the International Year, successfully launched an event on 18 February 2010 during which a high-level panel on peace and dialogue among cultures was held with the participation of representatives from all regions of the world. Participants from a broad section of society presented their contributions, with perspectives ranging from the political and intellectual to the religious viewpoints. The high purpose of the activities of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures is to raise awareness, culminating in the production and dissemination of information and the organization of several international and regional conferences covering a variety of projects in virtually all areas where various forms of dialogue and rapprochement could take place, such as in the arts, education, culture and youth issues. At this juncture, we would like to emphasize the role of regional organizations in this endeavour, as they represent important tools that can be used positively to further our objectives.

From our perspective, we would like to reaffirm that the strategy for building a culture of peace must, however, be based on sound and established principles that can build trust and understanding among the diverse peoples of the world and enable them to navigate from their differences towards productive ends and advantages. This will involve multifaceted and broad efforts, including gaining an understanding of each other's ways of life; the establishment of

means of resolving ongoing conflicts, so as to prevent them from further degenerating; the development of institutional frameworks and relevant capacities for peace initiatives; and the mobilization of resources at the national and regional levels for peace initiatives.

Promoting peace and understanding through mutual dialogue, tolerance and respect for each other requires a collective effort. It is therefore appropriate for all of us to join hands in this endeavour in order to move our world towards a more peaceful and prosperous one. We should also unite to de emphasize agents of strife and conflict among us and pay greater attention to those issues that create a harmonious atmosphere, in an attempt to guarantee the full and fundamental human rights of all the peoples of the world.

In conclusion, we believe that the central teachings of all religions emphasize dialogue and understanding. The international community will suffer from intolerance, bigotry and violence in the absence of those virtues and encourage the growth of extremist ideologies, violence and terrorism. Nigeria abhors the intolerance that exists throughout the world and the fact that those intolerant groups have access to greater and greater resources. We must all rise to counter those deviant tendencies that promote destructive activities with serious implications for social stability, peace and development. We must collectively send a clear message to Member States concerning their responsibility to promote religious harmony and tolerance and the equality of cultural traditions, religions, creeds and faiths. Nigeria looks forward to the time when the peoples of the world will have a better understanding of the diversity in the world. Finally, we must shift our thinking from our primordial ways and reset it in accordance with the march of globalization and its attendant implications.

Nigeria remains committed to all efforts geared towards the development of a culture of peace.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, let me express to the President the gratitude of my country's delegation for convening this important meeting of the General Assembly to discuss the items on the global agenda for dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace.

Although all religions and cultures have common denominators in terms of human values, the phenomena of fanaticism and religious and ethnic-based conflicts continue to worsen and pose a growing threat to healthy relations between countries.

The State of Qatar is of the firm belief that more importance should be given to the principles of dialogue among religions in order to find a solid platform for building a world that is peace-loving and understanding. That firm belief has encouraged the Emir of Qatar to host the fourth Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations in Doha, which seeks to establish a constructive dialogue among followers of varying faiths and religions in order to achieve better understanding of the principles and teachings of those religions and put them at the service of all of humankind. The State of Qatar has also hosted a number of international conferences on dialogue among religions. Those opportunities have become annual events aimed at deepening dialogue and communication. The series began with the First Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue held in Doha in April 2003, with the Eighth Conference to be held also in Doha from 19 to 21 October 2010 on the role of religion in the education of new generations.

The State of Qatar believes that dialogue among religions can have a positive impact on the dialogue among peoples and civilizations. From that standpoint, since the inception of the Alliance of Civilizations in 2005, our country has contributed by responding to the initiative of the former United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan, with the significant participation of Her Excellency Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned, the spouse of the Emir of Qatar, who participated in the High-level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations put together by Mr. Kofi Annan in 2005. That panel brought together eminent persons and major world leaders in order to forge important initiatives within the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations on education and training for young people with a view to achieving the final goal of rapprochement among peoples and cultures.

The State of Qatar supports the Alliance of Civilizations and has actively taken part at a very high level in all of the meetings of the Alliance of Civilizations that were held in Madrid, Istanbul and Rio de Janeiro to support the work programme of the Alliance and to give it the necessary momentum. That participation led to the presence of Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned, the consort of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar. In order to consolidate their support, Sheikha Mozah launched a

$100 million initiative to provide jobs for young people. Since its inception, this initiative has established connections with the private sector, which created a trade incentive for world institutions to address unemployment issues among youth. It has also developed a series of projects aimed at dealing with the unemployment problem among young people, specifically in three areas: policies, science and job opportunities. These initiatives will create work, businesses and ways for young people to obtain capital. Furthermore, the State, together with the Islamic Conference Youth Forum, adopted a project to establish a youth entrepreneurs' network in Islamic countries last April. The State of Qatar has also contributed, with the Secretary to the Alliance of Civilizations, to the establishment of a programme of scholarships for young people in the city of Doha in March 2010, as an experimental programme with a number of regional organizations. The State of Qatar will host the fourth Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations in December 2011 and will cooperate to that end with the secretariat of the Alliance and member States, so that the fourth Forum will represent a new departure for the Alliance of Civilizations, provide new momentum for its noble goals and initiatives, and promote the aims of the Alliance in bridging the gap between peoples and cultures.

Mr. Ashour (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): In our meeting today we are dealing with two important items on the international agenda that are especially important because of their strong connections to international peace and coexistence among peoples in a multicultural and multireligious world and an international political environment that is sometimes inharmonious and subject to conflicts. Those conflicts are fed by racist and extremist policies and tendencies that undermine the deployment of international efforts towards rapprochement, communication and coexistence among the peoples of the world and that in the long run threaten international peace and security.

Despite the bleak picture presented by the racist and aggressive policies and actions that our world is witnessing in certain areas and the analogous reactions from militant and extremist movements in various parts of the world, the genuine political will of the majority of leaders and peoples of the world could create an environment conducive to eradicating racism and extremism among people. The United Nations has a special and major responsibility to translate that international will into concrete realities on the ground.

We are all aware of the important role that the United Nations system plays, under the direction of the General Assembly and with the participation of UNESCO, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and other United Nations agencies and organs, to spread the culture of peace and non-violence and to encourage dialogue, rapprochement and alliances between civilizations, cultures and religions. Yet, we believe that the humble efforts that have been and are still being deployed by the international Organization and the mechanisms that have been adopted, though important, are inefficient and insufficient and cannot be relied on alone to realize our desired objectives. We fully realize that a reading of the history of human experience shows that policies of discrimination and racism, foreign occupation, poverty and hunger are among the major factors that give birth to and feed extremism, violence and intolerance.

My delegation has read attentively the report of the Secretary-General on intercultural, interreligious and intercivilizational dialogue (A/65/269), and the report submitted by the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization regarding the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010, contained in document A/65/299. The Libyan delegation appreciates the effort involved in the preparation of the two reports, their contents and the valuable information they contain, focusing on the important aspects of the issue that has been in the forefront of the world's attention in recent years, specifically since the tragic events of 11 September 2001, which have been condemned by the entire world and which have also been exploited by extremists and racists to distort the image of Islam, inciting antagonism against Islam and Muslims.

As is stipulated in General Assembly resolution 64/81 on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and rights, understanding and cooperation for peace, the exercise of the freedom of expression involves responsibilities and duties, which call for restraint in the exercise of that right. In that respect, we have all seen and heard in the media unjustified attacks on and deliberate distortions of one of the greatest monotheistic religions of the world and of its symbols, under the pretext of the right to exercise the freedom of expression. In that regard, we cannot

but warn of the dangerous consequences of insults against Islam, attacks on Islamic symbols, attempts to distort Islamic values and principles, and discrimination against Muslims in various countries.

The culture of peace could effectively enhance respect for human rights and strengthen solidarity among peoples and nations and support dialogue among cultures and civilizations that share many common universal values. Dialogue among civilizations contributes to the realization of peace, understanding and friendship among peoples and nations, while cultural bias, incitement and hatred against other cultures and religions increase hatred and violence among peoples and nations all over the world. Consequently, it is incumbent on us all to consecrate the culture of peace and spread it among peoples. However, that should not in any respect be interpreted to mean that we can force people who are suffering racist foreign occupation to accept the status quo, renounce their legitimate rights and give up their resistance to occupation in all its forms. If we did that, then we would be supporting oppression, extremism and injustice.

In conclusion, my country emphasizes the importance of peaceful coexistence among religions and cultures as an instrument and a necessary means to strengthening international peace and security through mutual respect and tolerance and not as a pretext for conflict and confrontation. My country calls for everyone to confront all that could create or lead to conflicts and incitement to religious, cultural or racial fanaticism and to reject all forms of expression that could be provocative or could insult religious symbols or beliefs.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Chullikatt (Holy See): As the General Assembly once again considers this agenda item, my delegation takes this opportunity to reaffirm the importance of States working together to build a culture of peace, to cultivate productive and sincere relationships, to seek out and follow the paths of forgiveness and reconciliation, to be transparent in their dealings with others and to be faithful to their word. If cultures are comprised of human persons, surely human persons can form a durable culture of peace. Such an attitude is at the heart of this Organization, which was founded on a determination to live together in harmony as good neighbours, uniting to maintain international peace and security.

Concerning the promotion of a culture of peace, my delegation also takes this opportunity to affirm the importance of interreligious cooperation, mutual understanding, open-mindedness, solidarity and an improvement in overall relations among all civilizations and peoples from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

The unique contribution of religions to the promotion of a culture of peace lies in their missions to serve the spiritual and transcendental dimension of human nature. Furthermore, they contribute to respect for human life and the observance of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Religions promote reconciliation by impelling people to move forward in a spirit of mutual cooperation. In a concrete way, they help facilitate the realization of peace, which is not merely the absence of conflict but the harmonious coexistence of individual citizens within a society governed by justice, one in which the good of all is promoted to the greatest possible extent. Religions help accomplish all that is within our human capacity.

In that regard, my delegation draws attention to the ongoing work of the Holy See for almost 40 years in reaching out to other religious traditions to promote interreligious harmony. Recent initiatives include the regular meetings of the Joint Committee for Dialogue of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the Permanent Committee of the Al Azhar for Dialogue among the Monotheistic Religions, the most recent of which was held this year in Cairo. It concluded, among other things, that the many causes of violence among believers of different religious traditions include the manipulation of religions for political or other ends; discrimination based on ethnicity or religious identity; and divisions and social tensions, as well as ignorance, poverty and underdevelopment.

The Permanent Committee also made important recommendations: to open our hearts to mutual forgiveness and reconciliation for a peaceful and fruitful coexistence; to recognize what we have in common and respect legitimate differences as a basis for a culture of dialogue; to recognize and respect the dignity and rights of every human being without bias related to race, ethnicity or religious affiliation; to acknowledge the necessity of promulgating just laws

that guarantee the fundamental equality of all; and to recall the importance of education for cultivating respect, dialogue and fraternity. Those are concrete ways to oppose violence among followers of different religions and to promote peace and harmony among religions.

The recent report of the Secretary-General on intercultural, interreligious and intercivilizational dialogue (A/65/269) has highlighted the activities of various United Nations entities that contribute to the promotion of dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions. The report also draws attention to the work of various offices and agencies of the United Nations system in promoting interreligious cooperation.

In that regard, it is important that United Nations offices and agencies engage cultures with full regard for the role of religion in those cultures. One crucial way of doing so is by not attempting to foster global and regional networks that advance principles at odds with the natural moral order — in particular, a reproductive health and rights agenda that runs counter to respect for the right to life of the unborn child. Such an approach would be an attempt to misuse religion for a particular agenda and would be disrespectful to followers of the various faith traditions.

Furthermore, my delegation wishes to draw attention to the report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/14/23) of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. That report emphasizes the role of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of access to means of communication in combating discrimination, as well as in fostering intercultural understanding and dialogue. At the same time, my delegation looks forward with interest to the series of expert workshops on the prohibition of incitement to national, racial or religious hatred that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights will be holding this coming year.

The followers of religions can do a great deal to promote lasting peace and harmony in the world, and the Holy See is grateful for the various initiatives aimed at achieving that noble goal. For its part, my delegation remains committed to working with those of other religious and faith traditions to help bring about a culture of peace for the benefit of the entire human family, and encourages all States to fully ensure the right to freedom of religion and conscience for all people and communities, for the peaceful coexistence of all members of the human family.

The Acting President: In accordance with resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now call on the observer of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Mr. Jilani (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): In the interest of saving time I will read only excerpts from my statement and will make the full statement available on our website.

Rooted in its vision and based on its fundamental principles, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is seriously committed to promoting a global culture of respect for diversity, non-violence and social inclusion. In a recently developed IFRC global strategy on violence prevention, mitigation and response, we define the culture of non-violence as one that respects human beings, their well-being and dignity, and honours diversity, non-discrimination, inclusiveness, mutual understanding and dialogue, willingness to serve, cooperation and lasting peace.

Our fundamental principles and humanitarian values inspired the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief. To date, the Code has been signed by more than 400 non-governmental organizations. The Code helps the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other humanitarian actors to bring together the different cultures worldwide under one set of standards for the conduct of humanitarian relief.

Last year, young volunteers from 150 countries gathered in Solferino, Italy, to mark the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Solferino. The youth committed themselves to inner change and the development of skills to promote harmony and positive attitudes within communities, to live under our seven fundamental principles as agents of behavioural change and to renounce violence and promote non-discrimination and respect for diversity and the culture of peace in the world.

In that context, the IFRC's initiative under the theme "Youth as agents of behavioural change" has been launched to empower youth to play a leading role in transforming mindsets, attitudes and behaviour in

their local communities. It starts from the premise that a prior commitment to inner change and to being the living example of our fundamental principles and humanitarian values is the best way to reach that objective.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has stood for human dignity since our founding almost 150 years ago, when our founder mobilized volunteer assistance for the wounded on the battlefield in Solferino. Today, the promotion of humanitarian values continues to be at the heart of the mandate of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on these items. The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda items 14 and 15.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.